

CBS EVENING NEWS
19 December 1984

CP01|SPACE SHUTTLE|RATHER: Good evening. This is the CBS Evening News, Dan Rather reporting. The United States military plans to put a new, harder-to-find, higher-tech spy satellite over the Soviet Union next month. It will be put into orbit with the next space shuttle. When this was reported today, the Reagan administration attacked the press for defying a request for secrecy. President Reagan called today's press accounts 'harmful to national security.' Defense Secretary Weinberger called it 'irresponsible.' News organizations called it informing a free people. Our coverage begins with David Martin.

MARTIN: A new generation of spy satellites designed to eavesdrop on Soviet communications, everything from telephone conversations to radio signals from Soviet missile tests. (sic) It will hover in stationary orbit 23,000 miles above the Soviet Union, constantly monitoring such things as Soviet compliance with arms control treaties. Despite Pentagon pleas for silence, this is what news organizations are reporting about the top-secret payload the space shuttle is scheduled to carry into orbit next month. The reports were immediately denounced by the secretary of Defense. CASPAR WEINBERGER (secretary of Defense): I think the publication of the material about military satellites does indeed damage our, our security.

MARTIN: But what is so secret about this satellite, so secret the Air Force refuses to release the shuttle's launch time in order to make it harder for the Soviets to track the satellite? Space experts say the Soviets can simply look through their telescopes and see the satellite once it is in orbit. MARCIA SMITH (space specialist): If you had a very poor-resolution telescope that most any youngster would have, for example buying from a catalogue, you may just see a blob of light. It would be the satellite, and you would be looking at the satellite, but you might not be able to make out any details on it.

MARTIN: That won't tell the Soviets what kind of satellite it is. But they already know the U.S. makes satellites for intercepting communications. In 1977, a young employee of TRW sold the Russians the plans for an earlier model of eavesdropping satellite. Still, the Soviets cannot be certain what kind of satellite will be on board next month's launch. It could be some other kind of satellite. And intelligence experts argue that removing the element of doubt for the Soviets is not in the national interest. STANSFIELD TURNER (former director, CIA): The problem here is an unraveling. More information comes out, and eventually, some kernel that the Soviets do not know is released.

MARTIN: Administration officials fear that if more details leak out, the Soviets will learn how to counter the satellite, and the billions of dollars already invested will be wasted. David Martin, CBS News, the Pentagon.

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MORTON: The space program has always courted the public, but with the space shuttle's first military mission scheduled for next month, that was supposed to change. GEN. RICHARD ABEL (director of public affairs, U.S. Air Force): Publication or broadcast of such information, speculative or not, would harm our national security.

MORTON: Defense Secretary Weinberger asked some news organizations, including CBS News, not to report what they knew about the payload. But he didn't ask the Washington Post, and it ran a story. CASPAR WEINBERGER (secretary of Defense): It's the height of the journalistic irresponsibility to, ah, ah, violate requests that are made.

MORTON: But the Post story didn't tell readers very much. Managing Editor Ben Bradley, in a radio interview this morning: VOICE OF BEN BRADLEY: We have said that the satellite is an intelligent satellite and that it's gonna be about 23,000 miles and it costs 300 million bucks. We're not innocent about national security.

MORTON: And a lot of that information, the Post said, was already available in technical journals and congressional hearings. NBC News did withhold information. Its president, Lawrence Grossman, said he didn't think the Post article was harmful, but added... LAWRENCE GROSSMAN (NBC News): There are still elements of it that we know about that we probably will not be reporting on the grounds that they are dangerous to the national security.

MORTON: It is a very old argument. Several news organizations heeded requests not to report plans for the unsuccessful Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. President John Kennedy said later if they'd gone ahead and reported it lives might have been saved. Vietnam rules were simple: Don't report an operation until it's made contact with the enemy. EDWARD JOYCE (president, CBS News): A very good case has to be made each time, an overriding and

MORTON: Former Defense and CIA chief James Schlesinger says there are many more leaks than there used to be because of a loss of discipline within the government. JAMES SCHLESINGER: To maintain secrecy, one has got to have a, an accepted pattern of preserving classification, and that no longer exists.

MORTON: The battle between government and press, classifiers and leakers, will go on. One result of this skirmish may be to strengthen the Air Force's argument that it wants its own rockets to launch intelligence satellites in secret, away from NASA's bright lights. Bruce Morton, CBS News, Washington.